
Force and Statecraft: Strategic Objectives and Relationships in New Zealand's 2010 Defence White Paper

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The 2010 *White Paper* argues persuasively for a defence force which can respond to threats against New Zealand and its territories, close ally Australia, and Pacific Island Forum countries. Traditional relationships are emphasised, including New Zealand's evolving security partnership with the United States and the Singapore and Malaysia centred Five Power Defence Arrangements. Despite some careful drafting on China, and some coverage of India, rather little attention is given to newer defence relationships in Asia at a time of regional transition. But the biggest gap may arise if ambitious savings targets are not realised by 2014-5, squeezing funding for core capabilities with a wider regional reach.

The heart of the defence policy challenge, as Hugh White has explored primarily in the Australian context, is a challenging triangular relationship between three intersecting and interacting variables: a country's strategic objectives (what it wants to do with the defence force), its defence capabilities (the defence force it needs) and its defence resources (principally the money that will be available). Aligning these three interdependent factors is no easy feat.

The immediate point of tension in New Zealand's 2010 *Defence White Paper*¹ is the bargain that has been struck between the second and third of these variables, i.e. capabilities and money. On the one hand, the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) gets to retain its current suite of capabilities, and can look towards the eventual replacement of the three major items: strategic airlift (currently the Hercules), maritime surveillance aircraft (currently the P3 Orions) and frigates (currently two ANZAC Class vessels) over the next ten to twenty years. In the meantime the NZDF will also be working to ensure that it has the necessary land-force numbers to sustain a battalion-sized Combined Arms Task Group deployment for periods of up to three years.² On the other hand, the price of this agreement on capability is a requirement for very significant savings elsewhere in what is by international standards a fairly modest defence budget.

¹ New Zealand Government, *Defence White Paper 2010* (Wellington: Ministry of Defence, November 2010).

² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

Those savings which can then be reallocated towards front line activities come in two packets. The smaller one is the existing Defence Transformation Project (DTP) where significant savings (in the order of NZ\$100 million³) have already been sought. As the DTP alone was not sufficient to meet the future funding gap, part of the way through the defence review process a prominent consultant with extensive private and public sector experience, Dr Roderick Deane, was commissioned to come up with a broader menu of efficiencies. The result is the independent Value For Money (VfM) report⁴ which was made public by the Ministry of Defence with a host of other background information nine days before Christmas,⁵ (a month after the publication of the White Paper). The combined requirements of the DTP and VfM are steep. As the *White Paper* observes:

The Government expects that by 2014/15 the NZDF will free up \$100 million from the DTP and \$250 million to \$300 million from other VfM initiatives, on an annual recurring basis, for front line activities.⁶

This represents a substantial portion of New Zealand's total defence expenditure. According to the VfM Report: "In the financial year to 30 June 2010, the NZDF spent [NZ]\$2.2 billion (including depreciation and a set capital charge) on its operations and [NZ]\$326 million on capital items."⁷ These savings targets are even more significant when they are supposed to come from "back and middle office" expenditure, estimated by the same report to account for 55 percent of the total spend.⁸ The discretionary element of this segment could be expected to be even smaller still.

Guns and Butter

This makes for an interesting challenge for the writers of the next *Defence Assessment*, which under a new five yearly cycle will be prepared in that 2014-15 crunch period. Within these three or four short years one wonders how many of these savings will have been identified, achieved and reallocated within the NZDF. One also wonders how much new money will need to be spent to save funds including in the civilianisation of as many as

³ At the time of writing, NZ\$100m equates to approximately A\$75m.

⁴ Roderick Deane and Greg Kay, *Value for Money: Review of New Zealand Defence Force*, August 2010, <<http://www.defence.govt.nz/pdfs/defence-review-2009-released-value-for-money-report.pdf>> [Accessed 9 March 2011].

⁵ In addition to the VfM report, this information includes the longer *Defence Assessment* of July 2010 upon which the *White Paper* is based, reviews of defence procurement practices and of structural relationships between the Ministry of Defence and the NZDF, and no less than thirty pieces of cabinet documentation tracing the evolution of the twenty month Defence Review process. This material is available online at: <<http://www.defence.govt.nz/defence-review.html>> [Accessed 9 March 2011].

⁶ New Zealand Government, *Defence White Paper 2010*, p. 77.

⁷ Deane and Kay, *Value for Money*, p. 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*

2000 positions currently held by military personnel.⁹ One wonders, above all, if savings will be sufficient to ensure that the government of the day does not have to make a substantial capital cash injection if it wishes to ensure the possibility of replacing the NZDF's major capabilities.

In the meantime, the NZDF budget will need to have absorbed the costs of capabilities which are new (such as the NH90 and A109 helicopters) and upgraded (such as the Orions and the Hercules). As the *White Paper* itself acknowledges "These programmes are putting pressure on the budget of the NZDF. Depreciation alone is expected to rise by about \$100 million over the next two years."¹⁰ While this amount may not seem especially notable in an Australian context where annual defence budgets are easily ten times as large as their New Zealand counterparts, this sort of figure represents a significant pressure across the Tasman. Moreover, it is hard to know whether there will be significant extra operational costs coming from unexpected overseas deployments. The NZDF will be hoping for a rather quieter operational tempo than it has been experiencing since the early 1990s.

It is around these sorts of issues, and the capability-resources leg of White's triangle, that much of the defence debate occurs in New Zealand (when it occurs at all). This may continue to be the case as New Zealand's economy, now facing the additional effect of the tragic February 2011 earthquake in Christchurch, struggles to come out of recession. John Key's government has been taking a large pruning shear to government expenditure in order to reduce public sector debt, so it is doubtful that there will be any sort of soft landing available for the NZDF which mitigates the effects of the VfM exercise. Defence will be unlikely to command a significantly greater share of the public purse in the foreseeable future as New Zealanders and their governments remain much more worried about their country's survival in an economic sense than about risks in the military strategic dimension.

This capability-resources challenge is nothing new for the makers of New Zealand's defence policy. Soon after Helen Clark's Labour-led coalition government was first elected in 1999, financial constraints were among the considerations leading to the disbandment of the combat air wing: the mantra was that the NZDF could not afford to spread its capabilities over quite the range that it had been seeking to cover. Not all of the capability

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11. Savings in workforce expenditure in this and other areas are expected to constitute half of the total VfM savings, see *Ibid.*, p. 10. In the major findings of the VfM study presented to Cabinet in September 2010, annual savings of \$300 million were set against extra costs of just \$30 million relating to Information Communications and Technology investment and increased property maintenance. See Defence Review: NZDF Value for Money Review, p. 4, attached to Cabinet Strategy Committee, STR 10(11), 3 September 2010, <<http://www.defence.govt.nz/pdfs/defence-review-2009-released-defence-review-white-paper-cabinet-combined-papers.pdf>> [Accessed 9 March 2011].

¹⁰ New Zealand Government, *Defence White Paper 2010*, p. 75.

decisions which occurred in that period were models of strategic logic, but over time the NZDF was restructured around a set of capabilities which seemed more affordable and also more suitable to the conditions in New Zealand's operating environment (and to the types of overseas deployments which were a feature of the post-Cold War era). When John Key's National-led government was elected nine years later, his party was not seeking to turn back the clock, but essentially accepted the force structure that was emerging as new and replacement items were coming into service. These included Project Protector where the Royal New Zealand Navy has been equipped with inshore and offshore patrol vessels and a multi-role vessel, the HMNZS *Canterbury*, which has become an ANZAC capability in light of the inoperability of Australia's existing strategic sealift capacity.¹¹

By the time of the 2008 general election which brought John Key's government into power, both main parties (National and Labour) had committed themselves to producing a new *Defence White Paper* if voted into office. This would become the first document to have such a title in New Zealand since the 1997 Paper.¹² But as this document, already over a decade old, had accepted the overall policy logic laid down in the 1991 White Paper,¹³ New Zealand's 2010 *Defence White Paper* really deserves to be treated as the first of its kind in nearly two decades.

This is not to say, of course, that New Zealand's defence policy triangle had remained unconsidered or unaltered for that period of time. In 1999 the Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade Select Committee of parliament published a major report on New Zealand's defence policy.¹⁴ And, as already indicated, Helen Clark's Labour-led government was certainly not slow to make significant changes to the NZDF. But instead of seeking a new *Defence White Paper*, it produced two smaller documents on defence policy.¹⁵ A rather more substantial document on New Zealand's security policy challenges was produced, but it was published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.¹⁶

¹¹ See Wayne Mapp, New Zealand Minister of Defence, 'Annual Meeting of ANZAC Defence Ministers', Media Release, 10 February 2011, <<http://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/annual-meeting-anzac-defence-ministers>> [Accessed 9 March 2011].

¹² See New Zealand Government, *The Shape of New Zealand's Defence: A White Paper* (Wellington: Ministry of Defence, 1997).

¹³ See New Zealand Government, *The Defence of New Zealand 1991: A Policy Paper* (Wellington: Government Print, 1991).

¹⁴ See *Inquiry Into Defence Beyond 2000*, Report of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee, I. 4D (Wellington: House of Representatives, August 1999).

¹⁵ See *A Modern, Sustainable Defence Force Matched to New Zealand's Needs*, Government Defence Statement (Wellington: Ministry of Defence, 8 May 2001), which includes as an appendix *The Government's Defence Policy Framework*, June 2000.

¹⁶ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *New Zealand's Foreign and Security Policy Challenges*, (Wellington: MFAT, June 2000).

With political leaders who were perhaps not keen to reopen debates about some of the larger strategic questions facing New Zealand, the Labour years of the first decade of the new century had their greatest impact on the capabilities-resources leg of the triangle. Little was done to fundamentally and formally revisit the question of New Zealand's strategic objectives even when major shocks and changes were occurring which altered the international and regional commitments of the NZDF including the commitment to Afghanistan after 9/11 and to the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands in 2003. New Zealand's defence policy, engagement and relationships evolved through practice. It was something of an understatement then for Dr Wayne Mapp, the Minister of Defence, to inform his cabinet colleagues in March 2009 that there had "not been any substantive review of defence policy since 2001."¹⁷

Where and How and With Whom Would Force Be Used?

There is even more reason then to consider the approach of the 2010 *Defence White Paper* to the question of strategic objectives. It is one thing to ask what sort of defence force New Zealand believes it can realistically afford to maintain. It is quite another to ask about the circumstances under which New Zealand would need and/or wish to deploy its armed forces. There are at least three aspects to this question: (i) in what situations, (ii) to what degree and (iii) with whom (and for whom) might the NZDF be deployed?

On the first and third of these aspects, the story is laid out in a refreshingly clear manner on the sixteenth page of New Zealand's 2010 *White Paper*. Five definite and one potential circumstance are mentioned in which "New Zealand would consider the use of military force" and it is useful to consider these in turn. The first of these is "in response to a direct threat to New Zealand and its territories." There is a sense in which this is an obligatory statement for any country about the first purpose of its armed forces. But it is to be wondered in New Zealand's case how much of a defence force could be justified alone by this consideration. While the idea of the defence of Australia can offer a planning basis for the development of a significant military capability, the same logic does not cross the Tasman for the idea of the defence of New Zealand nearly so well.

By international standards, New Zealand's threat environment, especially in terms of the risk of interstate conflict, is remarkably calm. Even so the

¹⁷ 2009 Defence Review: Terms of Reference and Processes, Office of the Minister of Defence to Chair, Cabinet Strategy Committee, 18 March 2009, p. 3, attachment to Cabinet Strategy Committee, STR (09) 5, 19 March 2009, <<http://www.defence.govt.nz/pdfs/defence-review-2009-released-defence-review-white-paper-cabinet-combined-papers.pdf>> [Accessed 9 March 2011]. The estimate at this early stage was that the *White Paper* would be complete by November 2009, *ibid.* p. 10.

surprising geographic spread of New Zealand's political responsibilities begins to tell a slightly modified story. The *White Paper* observes that:

It is the fundamental duty of any New Zealand Government to protect the territorial integrity and resources of New Zealand; to meet our constitutional obligations to the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau; and to maintain New Zealand's right of sovereignty in the Ross Dependency.¹⁸

Later on, as if to illuminate the significance of this situation, the writers of the *White Paper* argue that: "No other country of comparable size and political and economic standing has at a minimum to be able to deploy defence equipment and personnel from the equator to Antarctica."¹⁹ And in between these tropical and icy places lie not just the larger islands which make up New Zealand proper but a rather significant maritime estate whose value is increasing in an area of increased pressure on the riches of the sea. Hence, as the *White Paper* argues elsewhere, "Protection of the resources in New Zealand's maritime region is already a priority and will become more so."²⁰

It would not be easy or even sensible to generate from this first requirement a defence force of formidable striking power. But one would certainly want a force that can operate independently in a range of difficult environmental conditions and at considerable distances from places of supply and support. The rationale for maritime patrol and surveillance, air and sealift, for example, is partly here. Project Protector would appear to make sense, for example, on these grounds alone.

Part of that justification has to do with the range of non-combat challenges that occur in New Zealand's extended realm. The response to the tragic Christchurch earthquake has involved a deployment of NZDF personnel which dwarfs even the contribution to the 1999 mission in Timor Leste. But presumably even this huge emergency response would not shake the judgement of the *White Paper* that humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and similar missions should not be seen as the central focus of the NZDF. Instead "the core role of the NZDF is to conduct military operations."²¹ And lest this be interpreted as a requirement which only comes into play where New Zealand deploys internationally, the *White Paper* argues that in:

the highly unlikely event of a direct threat to our territory or seas by a hostile state, the NZDF would be expected to respond. It would be expected to provide at least a level of deterrence sufficient for New Zealand to be able to seek international assistance if required.²²

Precisely what would constitute New Zealand's capacity to offer deterrence is not specified. For example, New Zealand's ability to interdict armed forces

¹⁸ New Zealand Government, *Defence White Paper 2010*, p. 16.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

steaming towards it is somewhat limited: the types of advanced maritime combat capabilities maintained by Australia are not in evidence, although the combination of what New Zealand could offer from air and sea (Orions and frigates) ought not be discounted. It is also useful to consider from where international assistance might come. New Zealanders would probably expect Australia to be the first country to come to New Zealand's assistance in the event of a direct threat—as long as, of course, Australia was not totally consumed by a larger threat to itself.

For New Zealand's part, the *Defence White Paper* makes it abundantly clear about what New Zealand's first international priority would be in terms of assisting others in a military way. For the second circumstance where New Zealand would consider using armed force is "in response to a direct threat to Australia." Indeed, the *White Paper* goes to some lengths to demonstrate the firmness of this commitment. Shortly afterwards the reader finds the following statement:

Australia is our principal defence and security partner. We have no better friend and no closer ally. A wide range of political, economic, social and security connections underpin what has become a common trans-Tasman space. We would therefore immediately respond to any direct attack on Australia.²³

The idea of a common trans-Tasman space at first blush harks back to the idea promoted in the 1990s that New Zealand and Australia constituted a single strategic entity. But it is not as ambitious, or as optimistic, as that earlier rendition. There is a stronger sense of integration here and less perhaps of a single identity, and the basis for the common space rests on rather more than strategic considerations. (Moreover it must always be admitted that to the extent that there is such a common space it probably does not run to Australia's maritime territory in the Indian Ocean.)

Nonetheless the unequivocal and unconditional commitment to reacting to "any direct attack" on New Zealand's trans-Tasman neighbour is striking, if not especially controversial. In an age of floods, fires and earthquakes, New Zealand and Australian leaders have been ready to offer each other their own country's immediate assistance for non-military challenges. But this is also an age where there is an increasing prospect of great power maritime competition in the part of the region that is closer to Australia than New Zealand. Will it always been in New Zealand's interests for its commitment to extend to the further flung areas of Australian territory, including Christmas Island and the Cocos Islands (in the Indian Ocean) for example? Is it guaranteed regardless of the circumstances in which Australia gets itself into a stoush with a regional neighbour? These may seem unnecessarily pessimistic, and even churlish questions, but they need to be asked when such a strong alliance commitment is declared.

²³ Ibid.

It is also interesting to consider what a New Zealand response to a direct attack on Australia might constitute. Very wisely New Zealand's *White Paper* does not duck the reality that the combat capabilities of the two countries (who are members of the same 'family', to adopt the metaphor used successfully by Prime Minister Gillard during her recent visit to New Zealand) are moving in different directions. As the very next passage explains:

New Zealand's own security is enhanced by the investment which Australia has made in its national defence. Australia has military capabilities that we do not have, but which are essential for higher-end contingencies. The ANZAC relationship enhances the overall depth and reach of the NZDF.²⁴

That logic reads convincingly and reads well. But the cheeky strategic analyst is almost invited to wonder how many Australians sleep more easily at night confident in the reassurance that New Zealand feels that as a consequence it "is therefore in our interest to add to Australia's strategic weight."²⁵ If by strategic weight is meant the capacity to offer threats of armed force in combination with the ADF, then the limits on the scale and striking power of the NZDF come into question. That said, it can be argued with a significant level of certainty that the NZDF can make—and has already made—a recognisable contribution to the combined trans-Tasman capacity to utilise armed force in the immediate region. In particular New Zealand's Interfet commitment, and the subsequent Australian-New Zealand cooperation in deployments to Solomon Islands and Tonga, have demonstrated the utility of New Zealand's armed forces from Canberra's perspective.

The South Pacific Dimension

The continuation of that utility depends in part on whether there is a new (or recurring) Pacific security crisis which would precipitate an Australian and New Zealand reaction involving the deployment of armed force. Unless a completely extreme situation arises, this crisis is unlikely to be Fiji, whose own battle-ready armed forces have helped persuade both Wellington and Canberra since the original coup in 1987 that military intervention there would be an unwise option. But this does not rule out other locations for Pacific missions, short and long-term alike. Even so, New Zealand would want to have a degree of regional legitimacy established before any such missions were contemplated. The third situation in which New Zealand is willing to consider the use of force is expressed in this way: "as part of a collective action in support of a member of the Pacific Island Forum facing a direct threat."

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18

²⁵ *Ibid.*

It is in the South Pacific that New Zealand states its role in regional security with the greatest determination and focus. There are several aspects here. First there is the diagnosis:

Today, many Pacific Island states face chronic social, economic, environmental, and governance stresses ... The fragility of the South Pacific may lead to a more complex operating environment for the NZDF in the future.²⁶

Second, there is the sense of expectation and obligation: "New Zealanders will continue to expect", the *White Paper* says, "this country to play a significant security and assistance role in the South Pacific ... These expectations are matched in the region itself, and in Australia."²⁷ Third there is the need for this effort to be welcomed by the country involved: "Our military engagement with the region will be most effective if it enjoys the consent of the receiving state."²⁸

According to the 2010 *White Paper*, New Zealand needs to be open to quite a range of possibilities and prospective partners in the immediate region: On the one hand there is the ambitious remit that "New Zealand, with Australia, needs to be able to deal with any reasonably foreseeable contingency in the South Pacific."²⁹ On the other hand the list of potential partners extends to a European power which might not have warranted such a favourable mention in earlier years:

In those parts of the world where other states might be expected to take the lead (the US in the case of Micronesia, and France in New Caledonia and French Polynesia), New Zealand should be ready to assist.³⁰

But it is not all about partnerships—there is the need for New Zealand to be able to do some things on its own:

There may be circumstances in the future where we would want the NZDF to lead an operation in the South Pacific or to operate there without needing to rely on others.³¹

The South Pacific thus becomes, alongside the security of New Zealand and its territories, the only other space where Wellington's planners require the

²⁶ Ibid., p. 29.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 38.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 29. The *Defence Assessment* contains a particular note of unease not found in the *White Paper*: "If South Pacific governments were to become resentful or opposed to Australian and New Zealand influence this could change the consent environment in the South Pacific during the period covered by this Assessment." New Zealand Ministry of Defence, *Defence Assessment*, July 2010, <<http://www.defence.govt.nz/pdfs/defence-review-2009-released-defence-assessment-july-2010.pdf>> [Accessed 9 March 2011], p. 16.

²⁹ New Zealand Government, *Defence White Paper 2010*, p. 38

³⁰ Ibid., p. 38.

³¹ Ibid., p. 39.

capacity for the independent, self-reliant use of force. This has direct and powerful implications for the shape of the NZDF:

Meeting our security objectives in our maritime zone and the South Pacific should be the starting point for selecting New Zealand's military capabilities. Not only is this the area where we have least discretion for our interventions, but structuring our capabilities in this way would provide the resources need to address New Zealand's own likely security requirements. It would also add weight to Australia in an area of continuing common interest.³²

It might be thought that this does not set up an especially formidable challenge for the makers and executors of New Zealand's defence policy. But the demands of operating in the South Pacific, suggests the *White Paper*, are not inconsiderable:

In our immediate region, the NZDF needs to be able to deploy forces across distant shores into unstable, potentially hostile but not high-intensity environments, and sustain them there until the task of restoring peace and security has been accomplished. We should also be prepared to lead operations in the region, if necessary.³³

Yet this is not to say that the South Pacific is in any sense the area where the NZDF will be involved in situations of greatest lethality. The same section of the *White Paper* goes on to argue that:

Operations beyond our immediate region are likely to involve the NZDF in higher-intensity environments. We must therefore have capabilities which can be integrated with, and operate alongside, our international partners in such operations.³⁴

Once one gets outside of this South Pacific environment there is very much the sense here of New Zealand operating as a supporting partner rather than an as a leading actor which can operate independently. There is nowhere to be found in this *White Paper*—or in New Zealand's strategic thinking more generally—an ambition to shape even a portion of the wider regional environment and to maintain a technological edge there (as one sees in Australian thinking).

³² Ibid., p. 41. Months earlier, the *Defence Assessment* had argued that: "The ability to perform core military tasks in our immediate neighbourhood should therefore be the principal determinant of future NZDF capability development, and a priority over other areas for the actual conduct of military operations. It also means optimising the NZDF for intra-state conflict." New Zealand Government, *Defence Assessment*, p. vii.

³³ New Zealand Government, *Defence White Paper 2010*, p. 45. The latter requirement does not apply to New Zealand's potential role in coming to Australia's direct assistance (as discussed above). While Australia clearly lies in New Zealand's immediate region, the NZDF would become in such a circumstance the junior party in an ANZAC or wider coalition featuring a much stronger and more capable ADF.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 45.

New Zealand's reliance on partnerships in that wider regional environment is clear in the fourth circumstance where the *White Paper's* authors believe that New Zealand might need to consider the use of force. But the commitment here is a fairly specific one: "as part of New Zealand's contribution to the FPDA." This is intriguingly a more concentrated and limited form of the corresponding treatment of the issue which is to be found in the July 2010 *Defence Assessment* which states that New Zealand could use force "as part of collective action in support of a member of ASEAN facing a direct external threat, and specifically in support of the FPDA."³⁵ (One wonders how far into mainland Southeast Asia this potentially extensive commitment might have gone.)

Into the Wider Asia-Pacific Region—and Beyond

The limitation of this clause found in the *White Paper* is not a controversial one. It is fairly standard for New Zealand's defence policy community to mention the Five Power Defence Arrangements (set up forty years ago for the external defence of Malaysia and Singapore) as an indication of New Zealand's interests in security beyond its own immediate region. (The other two members are the United Kingdom, the former colonial power and security guarantor, and Australia, which has long been the lead contributor to the FPDA.) But it is not so standard for New Zealand to explicitly commit itself to the possibility of using force in support of its FPDA obligations (which in the main are to consult with the other members in the event of an external threat to peninsula Malaysia or Singapore). There is more than a touch of strategic seriousness in the comments that the *White Paper* makes elsewhere on this same subject:

New Zealand's security relationships with Singapore and Malaysia, founded on the FPDA, are likely to remain out most enduring in the region. So long as these regional states maintain their support for the FPDA then New Zealand will continue to do so. As New Zealand's most significant operational security link to Southeast Asia, the FPDA will continue to provide a valuable anchor for the presence of our defence assets in the region.³⁶

One could argue in fact that the FPDA is New Zealand's "most significant operational link" to the whole of the wider Asia-Pacific region. Given the increasing significance of maritime Southeast Asia to the strategic change which is occurring in East Asia as a whole, as the great power balance shifts the FPDA might be useful as a not especially demanding way of showing that the NZDF has the capacity to deploy beyond its immediate neighbourhood. This comes with the appeal of Singapore and Malaysia as long-standing regional (and Commonwealth) partners of New Zealand, not requiring the creation of new commitments and expectations, and the appeal

³⁵ New Zealand Government, *Defence Assessment*, p. 23.

³⁶ New Zealand Government, *Defence White Paper 2010*, p. 30.

of working with two other long-standing partners, Australia and the United Kingdom. (See below for a treatment of traditional partnerships.)

The fifth criteria under which New Zealand would consider the use of force is no great surprise, but it does come with an intriguing twist. The unsurprising part is the statement that New Zealand could use military force “if requested or mandated by the UN”. Given the NZDF’s long and busy record of contributing to United Nations peacekeeping and peace support missions, and the strong public and cross-partisan political support within New Zealand for these roles, it would be a gross error of omission for the *White Paper* not to have recognised this feature. (And, as the *White Paper* notes on an earlier page, “The UN is the principal source of legitimacy for the use of force in international affairs.”³⁷) But this is not where this statement ends; the *White Paper* indicates that New Zealand would be inclined to participate in UN authorised or mandated missions “especially in support of peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region.”

There are of course examples in recent history which meet this regional dimension: the UN mandated deployment to Timor Leste being the most recent, and some years before there was the mission in Cambodia which came at the end of the Cold War. But given the general reluctance of East Asian countries to submit their disputes to wider UN auspices and to seek such assistance, and the higher frequency of UN missions further afield in Africa and the Middle East, this regional preference on New Zealand’s part may be easier said than done. Yet it offers one more sign of New Zealand signalling that the NZDF does see the wider Asia-Pacific region as a genuine area of emphasis for its activities. Doing so with a UN peace operations connection may also extend New Zealand’s regional horizons without necessarily requiring a significant investment in the advanced maritime combat systems that is seen across the Tasman in Australia, something well beyond New Zealand’s purchasing power.

This doesn’t mean that New Zealand would never do combat in Asia. The 2010 *White Paper* is quite unequivocal on the need for that ability, but it expresses it in a way which defines and in some way limits the scope for New Zealand’s involvement: “New Zealand’s contributions beyond our region will ordinarily be scaled to the size of the NZDF”, says the *White Paper*, a clear indication of a realistic assessment of how much a small armed force has to offer in a bigger and wider world. But New Zealand’s contributions, while small, must nonetheless have a certain quality about them: “Their operational and diplomatic value will be assessed by where they sit on the scale of military credibility. Having effective combat capabilities is therefore critical.”³⁸

³⁷ Ibid., p. 18.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 45.

Quite where it is critical for New Zealand to have combat capabilities ready for the *White Paper* does not quite confirm. This is an unfair observation to a point because hardly anyone knows where the next crises may occur where New Zealand would wish to play a role. But current experience would suggest to New Zealanders that it is Afghanistan (not Timor Leste, with 1999 and even 2006 fading in the memory, and not the potentially competitive arena of Northeast Asia), where that combat capability has most recently been required. Memories of commitments further afield also appear to have informed the choice of a “middle pathway” for the future structure of the NZDF including the need for a strengthened capacity to deploy and sustain land forces abroad. As the *Defence Assessment* argues

Although still primarily configured for the South Pacific, this pathway would give the Army sufficient depth to sustain a maximum land forces deployment of 800 personnel with two rotations per year (each lasting six months) for up to three years in a mid-intensity environment.³⁹

While the South Pacific may be a primary driver of capability it is clearly not the only one. In this context the *White Paper* does give some encouragement to New Zealand's long record of genuinely extra-regional commitments. Somewhat strikingly (and perhaps a bit courageously) the *White Paper* argues that:

New Zealand's strategic interests extend beyond the Asia-Pacific region. The Middle East provides a persistent challenge to stability ... The NZDF has had a presence of one kind or another in the Middle East for much of the last seventy years ... We expect that New Zealand, whether under the UN flag or international coalitions, is likely to be asked to contribute to future regional stability operations in the Middle East.⁴⁰

This is not an unlimited liability for New Zealand, but it still gives the impression that New Zealand is waiting to be asked to help out in that part of the world. Whether the invasion of Iraq in 2003 can be classified as a “regional stability operation” is an interesting question, but in that instance, unlike traditional partners the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, New Zealand was not prepared to send its forces to join the coalition. This experience informs the *White Paper's* very careful depiction (and limitation) of a possible sixth criteria for the employment of force by New Zealand. While it was “likely that ad hoc coalitions prepared to use force will arise in the future, and that New Zealand might be asked to contribute” this did not mean that the NZDF would always be available:

³⁹ New Zealand Government, *Defence Assessment*, p. 41. In presenting the final draft of the White Paper to Cabinet the Office of the Minister of Defence advised that “There will be a particular emphasis on enhancing the NZDF's ability to sustain land operations.” Office of the Minister of Defence to Cabinet External Relations and Defence Committee, ‘Defence White Paper: Final Draft’, p. 1, attached to Cabinet External Relations and Defence Committee, ERD (10) 48, 21 October 2010, <<http://www.defence.govt.nz/pdfs/defence-review-2009-released-defence-review-white-paper-cabinet-combined-papers.pdf>> [Accessed 9 March 2011].

⁴⁰ New Zealand Government, *Defence White Paper 2010*, p. 31.

The possible scale and nature of such a contribution would depend on our assessment of the merits; the extent to which New Zealand's interests were directly involved; the international legality; the conditions on the ground, and whether we would be acting in the company of like-minded states.⁴¹

Traditional Relationships, Not New Ones?

It does not take an advanced university degree to work out who is the most likely generator of these ad hoc coalitions. But nowhere, despite the improvement in US-NZ relations does the *White Paper* talk specifically about New Zealand assisting the United States in this fashion. There are however, some very warm words about the importance of America's strategic engagement in the Asia-Pacific region: New Zealand should, the *White Paper* argues, be in the business of "supporting a continuing US security presence as a contribution to regional security" in the Asia-Pacific.⁴² While the *White Paper* is rather quiet on what this means in terms of New Zealand's strategic positioning, the earlier *Defence Assessment* offers some rather interesting observations on this score, noting that "The US contribution to regional stability will be welcomed by most of the region's governments"⁴³ alongside a comment on the possibility of future tension between Washington and Beijing. While there is no attempt to seek the formal restoration of the ANZUS alliance relationship between Washington and Wellington, the *White Paper* also refers favourably to the security benefits which come from New Zealand being "an engaged, active, and stalwart partner of the US" and to the "steady increase in military contact and co-operation"⁴⁴ between the two countries. A hint of New Zealand's positioning and almost of alignment is carried in the *Defence Assessment's* comment that "Greater New Zealand participation in multilateral defence activities in which the US is involved will be welcomed by our security partners in the region, especially Australia and Singapore."⁴⁵

Published the last time the National Party came into office, the 1991 *Defence White Paper* had sought to emphasise New Zealand's credentials as a valued defence partner with traditional friends. That effort was only partially successful largely because the same government was politically wise enough not to overturn New Zealand's nuclear free legislation, the main price that would need to be paid for a restoration of closer relations with the United States. Nearly twenty years later we are not really presented with a

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴² New Zealand Government, *Defence White Paper 2010*, p. 39.

⁴³ New Zealand Government, *Defence Assessment*, p. 16.

⁴⁴ New Zealand Government, *Defence White Paper 2010*, p. 19.

⁴⁵ New Zealand Government, *Defence Assessment*, p. 16. In other materials prepared for Cabinet consideration officials pointed out that Singaporean expectations from New Zealand in terms of defence visits, exercises and exchanges were considerably higher than those held by other countries in Asia. See Defence Policies, Global Considerations, Attachment to Cabinet Strategy Committee, 'Defence Review 2009: Priorities and Objectives', STR 09(22), 14 August 2009, <<http://www.defence.govt.nz/pdfs/defence-review-2009-released-defence-review-white-paper-cabinet-combined-papers.pdf>> [Accessed 9 March 2011].

carbon copy. The 2010 *White Paper* seeks to demonstrate New Zealand's credentials as a valued partner. But during the nine years in which Labour had been in power, New Zealand and the United States had taken some steps to improve their security relationship while acknowledging their past differences on the nuclear question. While it cannot be said, therefore, that the Key government and the Obama Administration had started this trend, they have continued and intensified the bilateral connection, as symbolised in the signing of the Wellington Declaration just days after the release of the *White Paper* during a visit to New Zealand by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.⁴⁶

While the *White Paper* pays particular attention to New Zealand's relations with two traditional partners, Australia and the United States, the theme does not stop there. This is a document which celebrates New Zealand's part in the slightly wider grouping of "like-minded states" which also include the United Kingdom and Canada.⁴⁷ New Zealand's partnerships with these countries, the *White Paper* argues, "are grounded in common traditions, experiences and values" and are "made concrete by the sharing of risks in operations around the globe."⁴⁸

There is no question that New Zealand enjoys relationships of an intensity with these traditional partners of the English speaking world which is unmatched by other linkages. The *White Paper* acknowledges that this closeness extends to "intelligence sharing, and the application of military doctrine".⁴⁹ It is difficult to see the intimacy of these relationships replicated beyond this small circle. But the *White Paper* possibly errs on the side of conservatism in giving such strong emphasis to traditional partnerships and correspondingly little attention to the possibilities and value of newer relationships, including in the Asia-Pacific region. This applies to both Northeast and Southeast Asia.

In terms of the former, the *White Paper* does acknowledge that New Zealand needs to enjoy good relations with a range of traditional and new players in the wider region. It describes "China, Japan, Korea and the US" as "major powers" who each have a "pivotal" role in East Asia's future. Correspondingly each one of these 'major powers' constitute "important relationships for New Zealand".⁵⁰ But the *White Paper* is reluctant to go into any detail on New Zealand's relationship with China, Asia's main rising

⁴⁶ See New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Wellington Declaration on a New Strategic Partnership Between New Zealand and the United States of America', <<http://www.mfat.govt.nz/Media-and-publications/Features/665-Wellington-declaration-on-new-NZ-US-partnership.php>> [Accessed 9 March 2011].

⁴⁷ New Zealand Government, *Defence White Paper 2010*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18. New Zealand's links with NATO, which the *White Paper* seeks to "continue gradually to develop" also receive notable attention. See *ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

power. Instead there is some very careful drafting which demonstrates an awareness of the implications of China's rise without wanting to set off the alarm bells (as had occurred to some extent after the publication of Australia's *White Paper* in 2009). According to the New Zealand document:

The strategic balance in North Asia is shifting. China both benefits from and contributes to regional stability and prosperity, but there will be a natural tendency for it to define and pursue its interests in a more forthright way on the back of growing wealth and power. The pace of China's military modernization and force projection programme, and the response this could prompt from neighbouring states, may test the relationships of the major regional powers.⁵¹

A summary of the *Defence Assessment* presented to the External Relations and Defence Committee of Cabinet in mid-2010 paints a slightly more wary picture:

The rise of China is changing the strategic balance, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. New and evolving international and regional institutions will come under pressure as they try to accommodate a more prominent China.⁵²

The full *Defence Assessment* itself confirms this sense of regional edginess:

There is an outside possibility of conflict in North Asia in the timeframe of this Assessment. This could be precipitated by a dispute in China's maritime periphery.⁵³

No reader of the *White Paper* could reasonably conclude that New Zealand wanted in any way to buy into a contest with China. But at the same time its writers seems reluctant to talk more explicitly about the relationship that New Zealand itself wants to craft with China, and one also looks in vain for such indications in the *Defence Assessment*. There are two very interesting points of comparison here. In the first instance, the treatment of China and the United States, if not quite poles apart, are considerably different. This contrast comes out especially clearly in a diagram presented to the Strategy Committee of the New Zealand Cabinet in August 2009.⁵⁴ In considering the contribution made by the NZDF's to "support strategic stability and promote New Zealand's interests in the Asia-Pacific region with military assets", a range of objectives are presented. The first of these reads: "US strategic position in region maintained". Another objective is to reinforce New Zealand's own relationship with the United States. In between these is the

⁵¹ New Zealand Government, *Defence White Paper 2010*, p. 30.

⁵² Office of the Minister of Defence, *Defence Assessment: Summary Report*, p. 3, attached to Cabinet External Relations and Defence Committee, *Defence Assessment: Summary Report*, ERD 10 (30), 28 June 2010, <<http://www.defence.govt.nz/pdfs/defence-review-2009-released-defence-review-white-paper-cabinet-combined-papers.pdf>> [Accessed 9 March 2011].

⁵³ New Zealand Government, *Defence Assessment*, p. 18.

⁵⁴ Under the Key government, diagrams play a leading role in the communication of ideas by officials for Cabinet consideration, in some cases in place of prose text.

following: "Reinforce bilateral and regional relations with key Asian countries." Together these provide an interesting context for the fourth objective in the list: "China's increasing power managed constructively."⁵⁵

The second interesting comparison here is with India. While clearly the region's second rising power, New Zealand's relationship with India is undeveloped to say the least. The *White Paper* notes that "New Zealand's engagement with India both bilaterally and in regional institutions will continue to expand."⁵⁶ The *Defence Assessment* is more direct, describing India's growing power as "more an opportunity for New Zealand than a threat. This is likely to be reflected in greater military engagement."⁵⁷ The reader is left to wonder why such a connection is welcomed with India but is not mentioned in the case of China, whose Asia-Pacific presence is, at least for now, considerably stronger.

There are other interesting comparisons and omissions. The *White Paper's* near silence on Japan appears to speak volumes on that country's disappearing profile on New Zealand's security relationship radar. The *Defence Assessment* is more forthcoming, noting Japan's 'formidable' Self Defence Force and its nervousness in the face of the changing strategic balance, and Tokyo's efforts to do more to engage in multilateral forums.⁵⁸ Even so one can assume that the writers of the two papers see either little reason, or little opportunity for a significantly enhanced defence relationship between Japan and New Zealand.

But it is the complete absence of a reference to Indonesia anywhere in the *White Paper* which takes a bit more to get used to. The largest neighbour of New Zealand's most important neighbour does get a mention in the supporting documents released in mid-December, but its non-appearance in the published paper is a worrying sign of New Zealand's inability to work out a way of relating to the largest power in Southeast Asia. Having waxed on about the importance of the FPDA, which has been treated with understandable suspicion by Indonesia in the past, and also about the importance of New Zealand's role in Timor Leste, this neglect seems all the more perplexing. New Zealand certainly did need to pay attention to its traditional partners in Southeast Asia, namely Singapore and Malaysia, but the 2010 *White Paper* might have given at least a few words to the positive contribution that Indonesia's political evolution has made to regional

⁵⁵ Defence Policies, Global Considerations, 14 August 2009, <<http://www.defence.govt.nz/pdfs/defence-review-2009-released-defence-review-white-paper-cabinet-combined-papers.pdf>> [Accessed 9 March 2011].

⁵⁶ New Zealand Government, *Defence White Paper 2010*, p. 31.

⁵⁷ New Zealand Government, *Defence Assessment*, pp. 18-19.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

security.⁵⁹ How this gap looks in Australian eyes would be interesting to discover.

There are some other silences in the *White Paper* which raise important questions. There are no specific reference to the two largest and most important Pacific Island countries. Is the absence of a reference to troubled Fiji an indication that New Zealand does not want to draw attention to the problems of generating a policy which can influence events there? Does the *White Paper* not mention Papua New Guinea, which is a larger country than New Zealand by population, because it is more convenient to see this as a relationship (and obligation) that Canberra needs to carry? Is New Zealand seeking both to stamp part of its authority on the region but also to significantly limit its liability? Or is the message here that the NZDF and New Zealand's defence diplomacy has little role?

Conclusion

Despite these conspicuous silences, New Zealand's 2010 *Defence White Paper* nonetheless succeeds in focusing the reader's attention on Wellington's regional interests. This occurs in two senses. First there is the closer region, where the challenges of South Pacific operations provide the main guide for what we should expect of the future shape of the NZDF. Second there is the further region, East Asia, where the writers of the *White Paper* seek to demonstrate that New Zealand's defence engagement extends beyond its immediate surrounds. This *White Paper* puts the region above the wider world. In that sense while its take on that region is not always identical to Australia's (and there is no reason to think that it should be), there is a trans-Tasman agreement on the importance of the regional dimension for defence planning over the next generation. The relative importance of the Pacific and East Asian elements of that regional dimension does differ, however, in New Zealand and Australian thinking.

So much for strategic objectives. What does the relationship between the two other sides of the defence triangle, the NZDF's capabilities and the resources available to it, mean for them? If one was seeking to establish where New Zealand's strategic objectives were most vulnerable, the most obvious answer involves the possible impact of a breakdown of the ambitious targets that have been set for the reallocation of resources within New Zealand's defence expenditure. Should the writers of the next *Defence Assessment* come to their task in the knowledge that only a portion of the

⁵⁹ The *Defence Assessment* acknowledges Indonesia's political and economic reform as a reason for relative stability in maritime Southeast Asia but raises questions about the permanence of this progress. See *Ibid.*, p. 18. Similarly the *Defence Assessment* includes Indonesia in the list of countries with whom New Zealand has an interest in "developing good bilateral defence relations ... encouraging them to operate constructively in the region." The other members of this list are Brunei, China, Japan, Korea, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

savings forecasted in the Value for Money Exercise had been realised, will they be allowed by the government of the day to assume that there was still room for the NZDF's three major capabilities to be retained and replaced? Of these three, strategic airlift seems needed in almost any arena (military and non-military) that it would appear safe, and as the first up (needing replacement around 2020), the decision to replace the Hercules might already have been made by 2015.⁶⁰ Of the remaining two, the long-range maritime patrol capability (needing replacement by about 2025) is probably the more secure. But what of the frigates, which will come to the end of their useful lifespan five years further on?

Should the future NZDF lose one of its two most advanced maritime capabilities, the case could still reasonably be made that New Zealand's South Pacific focus remained intact, including as a central rationale for defence cooperation with Australia. But it might strain credibility to say that New Zealand remained interested in concrete defence engagement in wider East Asia (in a physical rather than a diplomatic sense), especially at a time when the entry ticket to that club was increasing. Or might the growing reality of strategic competition in Asia be too strong to ignore even at the price of a significant capital injection in the NZDF some time between now and 2020? This is not something that the New Zealand government, cash-strapped as it is, wishes to contemplate at present. But it may be something to worry about for whichever side of the political house gains office in the 2014 general elections.

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⁶⁰ See the comment to this effect in New Zealand Government, *Defence White Paper 2010*, p. 52.